

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Situated on a 531-acre plantation located west of the Mississippi River and east of Lake St. John, Canebrake is protected from the Mississippi River by a levee which is located about 150 feet in front of the house. The one-and-a-half story, frame, vernacular dwelling is set upon high brick foundation piers, and its gable roof is pierced by one, inside-end, stuccoed-brick chimney at each gable end. The five-bay easterly facade is fronted by a gallery located under the broken front slope of the roof. The gallery is supported by wooden box columns with molded capitals that are echoed on the front wall by pilasters. The columns and pilasters are linked by a railing of rectangular-sectioned balusters with molded handrail. A wide, single flight of wooden steps leads to the center-bay entrance doorway. The entrance doorway consists of a pair of double-leaf, folding doors that are six-paneled and molded with the uppermost panels of each door having been glazed in the 20th century. The rear doorway is filled with a pair of double-leaf, folding doors that are three-paneled with the uppermost panels also glazed. The rear doorway features a sidelight on only the southern side of the door encasement. The windows of the house contain nine-over-six, double-hung sash and are closed by original shutter blinds on the facade.

The floor plan of the house is a double-pile plan with wide central passage. The door surrounds and baseboards of the hallway are plain and unmolded. The four rooms of the main floor are identically trimmed with architrave door and window surrounds, four-paneled doors that are molded on the hallway side only, and simply beaded bases. The front two rooms also feature matching, wooden pilastered mantel pieces.

Since its original construction ca. 1840, Canebrake has undergone two remodelings. As originally constructed Canebrake was a raised cottage with wide, open, central passage that featured a single-pile plan with "cabinet" rooms enclosing each end of the rear gallery. About 1850 to 1860, the rear "cabinet" rooms were enlarged and new millwork installed throughout the interior of the house, the central open passage was enclosed and extended to include the original rear gallery, a new gallery with "cabinet" rooms was added across the rear, and brick infill was used between the supporting piers on the southern half of the house to form pantry or storage rooms lighted by unglazed windows with metal bars.

After Canebrake was purchased by the Meserve family in 1910, the upstairs was finished into two bedrooms with a central passage, a large shed-roof dormer was added to the front slope of the roof, and a stairway was installed to connect the upper and lower hallways. The stairway, which features rectangular-sectioned balusters and a newel of clustered balusters, runs in an easterly direction along the southern hallway wall in a single, straight flight. A small frame hyphen was also added at the southwest corner of the rear of the house, and the southern end of the front gallery was sympathetically enclosed with the columns and railing left intact.

Numerous plantation outbuildings are located within the nominated property. In the rear yard of the house, at the southwest corner, is a shed-roof, frame chicken house and, at the northwest corner, is a 20th-century frame garage. To the rear of the yard of the house is the "quarter lot" which contains five remaining double slave cabins. The slave cabins are one-story, gabled-roof frame buildings with central chimneys, undercut galleries, and unglazed glazed, shuttered windows. A gabled-roof, frame barn is located north of the house and beyond the barn in a northerly direction is an additional double slave cabin that was relocated from the "quarter lot."

The physical condition of the main house is good, but the condition of the outbuildings ranges from fair to deteriorated.

ITEM 7 ADDENDUM BY LOUISIANA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

Summary Paragraph:

Canebrake is a rare surviving example of an antebellum agricultural complex. It includes an overseer's house, six slave cabins, a barn, a chicken house, and a garage. The overseer's house was constructed c.1840 and remodeled once in the 1850's and a second time c.1910. The six slave cabins, the barn, and the chicken house date from c.1840-c.1860 and have been altered very little. One of the slave cabins has been moved about 250 feet from its original location (see sketch map). The garage is a twentieth century addition and is considered a non-contributing element. Despite the alterations to the main house, the moving of one of the slave cabins, and the twentieth century

garage, Canebrake retains its significance as a rare surviving example of an antebellum agricultural complex.

Summary of Alterations to Main House and Complex:

Changes in the overseer's house in the c.1910 remodeling:

- (1) The attic was finished and a front pent dormer was installed.
- (2) An interior stair was installed.
- (3) A small addition was made at the rear.
- (4) The southern end of the front gallery was enclosed. The enclosure walls were set behind the original balustrade and columns.
- (5) The remainder of the front gallery was screened in.

Changes in the complex made in the twentieth century:

- (1) The construction of a small frame garage which is classed a non-contributing element.
- (2) The moving of one of the slave cabins from its original location (see map) to a new location beside the barn.

ITEM 7 ADDENDUM BY LOUISIANA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE (Continued)

Assessment of Integrity:

The Canebrake complex is significant as a cohesive collection of antebellum plantation support structures. The fact that one of the cabins has been moved slightly and that certain superficial changes have been made to the overseer's house has not affected its status as a rare surviving example of an antebellum agricultural complex (within the context of Concordia Parish). In any case, the cabins, the barn, and the chicken house are virtually unaltered.

Specific dates c.1840-1800 **
Builder/Architect not known with certainty (see below - for speculation on builder for c.1840)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)
Criterion A

Canebrake Plantation is the most agriculturally significant antebellum plantation complex in Concordia Parish, Louisiana. This significance is based on the survival and integrity of the slave cabins located in the "quarter lot" behind the main house and on the importance of the main house as a rare surviving example of an overseer's house on a plantation owned and operated by an absentee landlord who belonged to the planting aristocracy of Natchez, Mississippi. By the early 19th century, Concordia Parish had become principally a planting province for the planters who resided in Natchez in grand townhouses or suburban villa residences. By 1860, over 81% of the parish land was owned by these absentee owners and 91% of the population consisted of slaves (D. Clayton James, Antebellum Natchez (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), p. 148).

The main house on Canebrake is a good example of a typical raised Louisiana cottage with wide open central passage and was probably constructed ca. 1840 while the plantation was owned by Tobias Gibson and his partner William Harris, a planter who resided at Ravenna in Natchez. The original small size and plain finishes of the house and its close proximity to the quarter lot denote the role of the house as an overseer's cottage rather than a resident planter's dwelling. Nevertheless, the overseer's cottage is held physically, thus socially, aloof from the slave cabins by its elevation on high brick foundation piers, by its position slightly removed and forward from the quarter lot, and by its higher degree of finish. Although enlarged twice, the architectural integrity of the house has been little compromised since changes were in the form of additions rather than subtractions. The most

unusual and well-detailed architectural feature of the house is the use of double-leaf, hinged doors to enclose the central passage. These doors were probably installed in the mid-19th century when Canebrake was owned by Gerard Brandon of Brandon Hall near Natchez. The five, double slave cabins of the rear "quarter lot," their construction and their physical relationship to each other, the overseer's house, the barn, and the cotton fields provide a rare tangible resource for studying the living conditions of the slave and overseer of a large antebellum cotton plantation.

In 1910, Canebrake Plantation was purchased by Arthur Meserve of Illinois, whose grandson, Barry Maxwell, now resides in the main house. Unoccupied for a number of years, the house is being restored and renovated as a permanent family residence for the Maxwell family.

**This refers to the period of significance for the complex. The overseer's house was built c.1840, remodeled c.1860, and remodeled c.1910. The slave cabins and outbuildings date from c.1840-c.1860.

ITEM 8 ADDENDUM BY LOUISIANA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

Canebrake is locally significant in the area of agriculture because it is a rare surviving example of the type of plantation complex which dominated the agricultural landscape of antebellum Concordia Parish. As described below, 81% of the parish's land was owned by absentee landowners who lived across the river in Natchez, Mississippi. Hence, a typical plantation complex in the parish consisted of what one finds at Canebrake -- an overseer's house, slave cabins, and outbuildings. The context for evaluation is Concordia Parish. Hence, the complex is being nominated for significance on the local level.

In most of the antebellum South agriculture and agricultural life centered around the plantations and the plantation houses. The rural landscape was divided into plantation fiefdoms each of which was the center of its own little world. Each plantation was also an agricultural unit in which farming was administered by the local landowner who lived on the property.

Natchez, Mississippi was one of a number of exceptions to this agricultural land pattern. The great planters of Natchez lived in a state of splendid absentee ownership in a manner similar to European aristocrats, albeit on a smaller scale. Although these planters owned land throughout much of southern Louisiana, their holdings were concentrated in neighboring Concordia Parish. For example, in 1860, they owned 81% of the land in the parish. To a large extent, Concordia Parish was farmed through the use of plantation complexes consisting of an overseer's house, slave quarters, and outbuildings, but with no main house as such. (No main house was needed because the master was not in residence.) Essentially these were agricultural colonies to Natchez. They were also the most important factor in the parish's antebellum agricultural development.

Although many of the grand houses of Natchez have been preserved, little remains of the plantation complexes in Concordia Parish which supported them. As far as the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office is aware, Canebrake is the only surviving example of this type of farm complex in the parish. It is, therefore, a very important visual reminder of the parish's antebellum agricultural history. Canebrake takes on added significance when one considers that agriculture was by far the leading force in the development of Concordia Parish during the nineteenth century.

Major Bibliographical References

Concordia Parish, Louisiana. Chancery Clerk. Deed Books and Succession Books.

James, D. Clayton. Antebellum Natchez. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968.